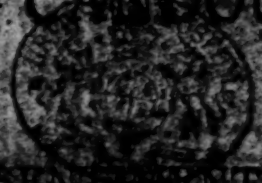


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ON THE NECESSITY OF
INCULCATING CANDOUR
AND
LIBERALITY OF SENTIMENT.
BY THE LATE
REV. ROBT. ROBINSON,
OF CAMBRIDGE.



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ON LIBERALITY OF SENTIMENT.

Candour and liberality are undoubtedly the most valuable blessings to society, the brightest ornaments of religion, and the most excellent and distinguishing characteristics of the disciples of Him *who did no violence, and who went about doing good*, teaching a religion founded in love. Every effort therefore which is calculated to diffuse the spirit of that religion which consists in love to all men, should be cordially adopted by every friend of man and disciple of Jesus Christ. Among the various publications inculcating the importance of candour and liberality, there are few which deserve more attention than the following Essay, composed by that ornament of religion and of human nature, the late REV. R. ROBINSON, of Cambridge; whose death, the perusal of this, as well as every other part of his writings, must give every friend of religious liberty and Christian charity fresh occasion to lament. The originality of the ideas, the force and perspicuity of the style, the conciseness of the Essay, and the popularity of the Author, as well as the general necessity of inculcating the sentiments it contains, and the difficulty of enforcing them from the pulpit, without incurring the charge of being a dry moralist and a legal preacher, are the reasons which induced an admirer of this composition to republish it. He therefore sincerely hopes that the benevolent Head of the Church will render it very useful to his orthodox brethren, to whose sentiments he deems it his honour and happiness to be a constant and unwavering friend.

BOOKS, like men, have a temper, and books of this kind should be good-tempered; they then conciliate esteem, and like a well-bred man give no offence; perhaps always communicate pleasure. It was said of our bloody Queen Mary, that she was a good-tempered lady of an ill-tempered religion.

Pity, any one should discover four morose tempers, who profess a religion all founded and finished in love! I wish, for the sake of justice as well as general utility, this publication may always exemplify *Liberality of Sentiment*.

By sentiment I mean *opinion*, and particularly *religious* opinion; the notion, idea, or judgment we form of the body of religion in the whole, or any of the parts that compose it. By *liberality* I mean *generosity*, which, strictly speaking, rather accompanies sentiment than goes into the nature and essence of it. It would be speaking more accurately to say, such a man is a person whose religious sentiments are accompanied with a liberality and generosity of heart towards others who do not adopt his sentiments, than to say in a vague manner, such a person is of liberal sentiments. This is too general, and I will explain myself.

A man of liberal sentiments must be distinguished from him who hath *no religious sentiments at all*. Nothing is more common than to meet with people who have never turned their attention to religion. Whether it be owing to the natural littleness of the mind, or to the neglect of education, or to the gratifying of our passions, to the company we keep, the occupations we follow, or the vain prospects of future enjoyments in life, or to any other cause, the fact is too well established. The Archbishop of Cambray somewhere resembles such a person to a man in distress for money, who would go into a room, receive, and reckon, and enjoy a large sum, without being able to tell, after he came out, any thing about the dimensions or the decorations of the room. The money, the money, the

the object of all his hopes and fears, had filled all the capacity of his little soul. So, many men enter into the world and quit it. Let not people of this class try to conceal the vacuity of their hearts under the specious pretence of liberality of sentiment. Let them rather blush for not being able to tell whether there be a God, or whether he have spoken, or what he hath said to mankind.

The man I mean to commend is the man of *sensibility*. He hath seriously and effectually investigated, both in his Bible and on his knees, in public assemblies and in private conversations, the important articles of religion. He hath laid down principles, he hath inferred consequences; in a word, he hath adopted sentiments of his own.

Nor let us confound the man of liberal sentiments with that tame, undiscerning domestic among good people, who, though he has sentiments of his own, yet has not judgment to estimate the worth and value of one sentiment beyond another. Two truths equally clear may not be of equal dignity and importance. Can the posture in which I address God, suppose it scriptural, be as important as the temper in which I pray to him? People of this class divide into two parts, the one have no essentials, and the other no circumstantialia in religion. The man, who would conceal this ignorance and indifference under pretence of liberality of sentiment, resembles Solomon's idiot, and says, "one event happeneth to the clean and to the unclean: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath."

Out of the hive of those, who have no circumstantialia, the objects of toleration in religion, come

a third class, who indeed have sentiments, and just sentiments, but who hold them in the unrighteous dispositions of censure, slander, and persecution. Morose and fierce as a stormy winter day, their aspect lours, and all their efforts damage the humble traveller, whose rusty cloak seems to him a nobler gift of God than all the mighty powers that endanger his comfort and his life. A generous soul will not only abstain from injuring the innocent, plundering the widow, and pillaging the orphan; but, to use a fine expression of a prophet, he will *despise* the gain of oppression, *shake his hands* from holding of bribes, *stop his ears* from hearing of blood, and *shut his eyes* from seeing evil.

What can a fierce believer reply to a modest christian uttering such soliloquy as this? You have a fine genius; but you persecute me! You are sound in the faith; but your faith or your something works hatred to me! You are an eloquent orator; but you slander me! You sing with harmony, and pray with energy; but you increase your felicity by crucifying me! Think seriously, would the King of kings, your Lord and mine, the pattern of every good work, would he treat me thus? and would you wish he should conduct himself to you, as you do to me? The man of liberal sentiments is supposed to be of the sentiments of Jesus Christ; and in Jesus Christ there are two admirable perfections, the one extensive power, the other the kindest and most gentle use of it.

We should extend this subject to an improper length, were we to describe the exercise of liberality of sentiment, and to enforce it by arguments. A sketch, then, shall serve.

A generous believer of the christian religion, in whole or in part, will never allow himself to try to propagate his sentiments by the commission of sin. No collusion, no bitterness, no wrath, no undue influence of any kind, will he apply to make his sentiments receivable; and no living thing will be less happy for his being a christian. He will exercise his liberality by allowing those who differ from him as much virtue and integrity as he possibly can. He will say, Have I read the scriptures? so have they. Have I set God always before me? so have they. Do I act up to my best light? so do they. Are they fallible? so am I. Have they prejudices and passions? so have I. Have we both one Master, and are we fellow-servants? and must we all give an account to the Judge of the world, of the deeds done in the body? The wisest and the best way then is, to render the present life happy by agreeing where we can, and, where we cannot by agreeing, to differ.

There are, among a multitude of arguments to enforce such a disposition, the following worth our attention.

First, We would exercise liberality in union with sentiment, because of the different *capacities, advantages, and tasks* of mankind. Religion employs the *capacities* of mankind, just as the air employs their lungs and their organs of speech. The fancy of one is lively, of another dull. The judgment of one is elastic, of another feeble, a damaged spring. The memory of one is retentive, that of another is treacherous as the wind. The passions of this man are lofty, vigorous, rapid; those of that man crawl, and hum, and buz, and, when on wing, sail only round the circumference of a tulip. Is it conceivable that capability so different in every thing else

else should be all alike in religion?—The *advantages* of mankind differ. How should he, who hath no parents, no books, no tutor, no companions, equal him whom Providence hath gratified with them all; who, when he looks over the treasures of his own knowledge, can say, This I had of a Greek, and that I learnt of a Roman; this information I acquired of my tutor, that was a present of my father; a friend gave me this branch of knowledge, an acquaintance bequeathed me that?—The *tasks* of mankind differ, so I call the employments and exercises of life. In my opinion, circumstances make great men; and if we have not Cæsars in the State, and Pauls in the Church, it is because neither Church nor State are in the circumstances in which they were in the days of those great men. Push a dull man into a river, and endanger his life, and suddenly he will discover invention, and make efforts beyond himself. The world is a fine school of instruction. Poverty, sickness, pain, loss of children, treachery of friends, malice of enemies, and a thousand other things, drive a man of sentiment to his Bible, and, so to speak, ring him home to a repast with his benefactor, God. Is it conceivable that he, whose young and tender heart is yet all unpractised in trials of this kind, can have ascertained and tasted so many religious truths as the sufferer has?

Secondly, We should exercise liberality along with our sentiments, because of *depravities* as well as imperfections of mankind. The patrons of error and vice have known mankind too well to hazard the cause of sin undisguised and in its native form. Is there a crime without an apologist, or one disgraceful action without a specious name? Is immorality

morality any thing more than fashion? Is not deism genius, and blasphemy spirit and courage? O the goodly pretences of error, the plausible pretexts of sin! How should a youth born in the lap of Error, nourished and cherished with her milk, surrounded with people all in error like himself, where every thing is in disguise, how should he, if his heart be depraved, how shall he resist a magic so full of charms! Depraved mankind! instead of persecuting you for embracing only five out of five thousand truths of religion, I will pity and esteem you, and adore the grace that emboldens you to admit the five: "You may be saved, yet so as by fire." Had I, depraved like you, perhaps more than you, had I been so powerfully attacked by error, I might not have been saved at all.

We should believe the christian religion with liberality, in the third place, because every part of the christian religion inculcates generosity. Christianity gives us a character of God; but, my God! what a character does it give! God is Love. Christianity teaches the doctrine of providence; but what a providence! *Upon whom doth not its light arise!* Is there an animalcule so little, or a wretch so forlorn, as to be forsaken and forgotten of his God? Christianity teaches the doctrine of redemption; but the redemption of whom? Of all tongues, kindred, nations and people; of the infant of a span, and the sinner of a hundred years old: a redemption generous in its principle, generous in its price, generous in its effects, fixed sentiments of divine munificence; and revealed with a liberality, for which we have no name. In a word, the illiberal christian always acts contrary to the spirit of his religion; the liberal man alone thoroughly understands it.

Fourthly,

Fourthly, we should be liberal, because no other spirit is *exemplified* in the infallible guides whom we profess to follow. I set one Paul against a whole army of uninspired men: "Some preach Christ of good will, and some of envy and strife. What then? Christ is preached: and I therein do rejoice, yea and will rejoice. One eateth all things, another eateth herbs, but why dost *thou* judge thy brother? We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." We often enquire what was the doctrine of Christ, and what was the practice of Christ: suppose we were to institute a third question, of what *temper* was Christ?

Once more: We should be liberal as well as orthodox, because truth, especially the truths of christianity, *do not want any support* from our illiberality. Let the little bee guard its little honey with its little sting, perhaps its little life may depend a little while on that little nourishment. Let the fierce bull shake his head and nod his horn, and threaten his enemy who seeks to eat his flesh, and wear his coat, and lives by his death: poor fellow! his life is in danger, I forgive his bellowing and his rage. But the christian religion, is that in danger? and what human efforts can render that true which is false, that odious which is lovely? Christianity is in no danger, and therefore it gives its professors life, and breath, and all things except a power of injuring others. They, who have such powers, and have incorporated them with christianity, have derived them from some other cause, for the *wisdom that is from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, firm as a rock*, and, so to speak, defies the unavailing rage of surrounding waves.

In fine, Liberality in the profession of religion is

a *wise and innocent policy*. The bigot lives at home; a reptile he crawled into existence, and there in his hole he lurks a reptile still. A generous christian goes out of his own party, associates with others, and gains improvement by all. The pride of some christians is so great, that they cannot conceive there should be any thing true which they do not understand, or any thing excellent which they do not possess. They cannot bear contradiction; and, conceiving themselves as models of religion, they judge of the perfection of others by the proportion they bear to themselves. So near me, so near orthodoxy: so much like me, so much like what a man ought to be: so many features of me, so much resemblance of Jesus Christ. *O heart of man! deceitful above all things and desperately wicked! who can know thee?* It is a Persian proverb, *a liberal hand is better than a strong arm*. The dignity of christianity is better supported by acts of liberality, than by accuracy of reasoning: but when both go together, when a man of sentiments can clearly state and ably defend his religious principles, and when his heart is as generous as his principles are inflexible, he possesses strength and beauty in an eminent degree. May God of his infinite mercy diffuse a rich abundance of this spirit among all good men!

FINIS.

a soft and inward feeling. The bigot lives at home; a republic he crawls into existence, and there in his hole he looks a republic still. A generous christian goes out of his own party, associates with others, and gains improvement by all. The pride of some christians is so great, that they cannot conceive there should be any thing true which they do not understand, or any thing excellent which they do not possess. They cannot bear contradiction; and, educating themselves as models of religion, they judge of the perfection of others by the proportion they bear to themselves. Do near me, to near or rhodomus; do much like me, to much like what a man ought to be; to many lessons of me, to much resemblance of Jesus Christ. O want of man's selfishness above all things and differently ranked, who can know that? It is a Persian proverb, a liberal hand is better than a strong arm. The dignity of christianity is better supported by acts of liberality, than by acts of reasoning; but when both go together, when a man of reasoning can clearly state and nobly defend his religious principles, and when his heart is as generous as his principles are inflexible, he possesses strength and beauty in an eminent degree. May God of his infinite mercy diffuse a rich abundance of this spirit among all good men!